

How to Create a Positive Team Environment

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There's nothing wrong with a little healthy competition among colleagues and peers. But there is a fine line between friendly challenges and a cutthroat approach to being the top producer on a team. When one team member is determined to be number one by any means necessary, the team runs the risk of creating a dysfunctional internal environment, which is neither professionally inclusive nor productive.

It is imperative, however, that someone takes the lead to motivate other team members. After all, according to Gallup, only 30 percent of employees are engaged and inspired at work. This results in losses to American businesses of about \$450-550 billion per year. Moreover, this indicates that unhappy employees are unproductive employees. It stands to reason then, that the key to a successful team lies in achieving balance where all members of a team are equally driven to achieve, even if only person can be "number one." In other words, the happier you can make your team members, the more productive the team – the whole team and not just one member – will become.

At a professional services firm where team members are mostly responsible

for their own production, it's the leader's responsibility to create this balance, and more importantly, maintain the delicate equilibrium of employee productivity and team morale. The question then becomes: How do you align assertive and entrepreneurial people with the trajectory of the greater company? How do you keep them at peak production, without fostering resentment or envy within the team? And finally, how can you get your top producer's energy to rub off on the remaining team members so that they too become top producers?

First, keep it real. Encouraging authenticity will not only build the internal trust needed for your team to function with a higher level of cohesion, but also cultivates the mutual understanding required for team members to genuinely care about each other. How do you create an environment where authentic interaction is the norm? Creating opportunities for employees to connect with each other in real ways such as office traditions and/or interacting with one another outside of the office are good places to start.

By way of example, our company's newest tradition is to begin all our office meetings with a competitive dance-off,



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where the winner walks away with \$100. Online retailer Zappos has its infamous "Picnic Olympics" tradition where teams compete in unusual activities, like a frog hopping race. To most people, this may seem like a day of self-induced humiliation; but the Zappos' team



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members rave about it. Vulnerability and acceptance of others is the shortest route to authenticity, and is an excellent way to create a safe space for interaction. As an added bonus, you may even pick up some new dance moves!

Secondly, show some appreciation. Social pressure has proven time and time again to be a bigger motivator than money. Showing genuine gratitude for another member of your team is the quickest way to reinforce positive behavior. Instead of using monetary incentives, consider showing members your appreciation via the way you treat them. Acknowledge their efforts and achievements in group settings. Congratulate them in front of the rest of the team. Create a social contract with

team members where the exchange is reciprocal and ongoing.

So build your culture and invest in your team. Once you've established a framework of professionals who truly care for each other and operate on a social contract basis instead of one based on financial compensation, then engagement, happiness, and productivity will quickly follow.

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